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East Timor: Human rights protection must be part of any agreement

In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, Amnesty International today urged that human rights protection measures be included in an agreement expected this week in UN-sponsored talks on the future of East Timor.

"At this crucial time for the East Timorese people it is vital that every effort be made to protect their security, their rights to express their views peacefully and participate freely in the process determining their future," Amnesty International said today.

The talks, which begin today and finish on 23 April, are expected to produce an agreement between Indonesia and Portugal on an autonomy package that will be approved or rejected by the East Timorese in a UN supervised ballot in July 1999. Indonesia has stated that East Timor could become independent if the package is rejected.

"Without measures to protect human rights contained in the agreement, the consultation process on the future of East Timor will not be seen to be credible by the East Timorese people and runs the risk of being undermined," Amnesty International said.

Human rights abuses in East Timor have escalated with an increase in violent activities by armed paramilitary units supported by the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI). At least 32 East Timorese and possibly many more have been unlawfully killed since 5 April 1999.

For all parties to have faith in the process, any transitional agreement must include the presence of independent and impartial human rights monitors. The UN is best placed to provide such a presence. Full access to all areas of East Timor for domestic and international human rights monitors, humanitarian organizations and to members of the media should be guaranteed. Measures to protect internally displaced people are also needed.

The agreement reached this week should also provide for the disarming and disbanding of all paramilitary units and should also pave the way for there to be full and impartial investigations into

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT
1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom
Tel: Int. Code: (44) (171) 413 5500. UK Code: (0171) 413 5500. Fax: Int. Code: (44) (171) 956 1157. UK Code: (0171) 956 1157.
E-Mail: amnestyis@amnesty.org Web: http://www.amnesty.org
Telegrams: Amnesty London WC1 Telex: 28502 AMNSTY G

for any abuses. Supporters of continued integration with Indonesia should also be protected against abuses by the East Timorese National Liberation Army (*Falintil).*

"The future of the East Timorese hangs in the talks taking place this week," Amnesty International said. "The conditions for the ballot to take place is just the first step. Measures for the long-term protection of human rights also need to be agreed upon at this stage in order to ensure the security of the people of East Timor after the ballot."
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